

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LONDON 05266

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, ICFTU, ILO, UK

SUBJECT: THE SHELEPIN AFFAIR - AN EXTENDED FOOTNOTE

REF: (A) MOSCOW 4592; (B) LONDON 5031; (C) STATE 77291

1. SUMMARY - AFTER A HURRIED AND HARRIED VISIT -- MARKED
BY HECTIC CHASES REMINISCENT OF KEYSTONE COMEDY, INCLU-
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DING AND HONEST-TO-GOODNESS STAND-IN FOR THE LEADING

CHARACTER, PUNCTUATED BY OUTLANDISH STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS FROM SOME OF THE LEADING PLAYERS ON BOTH SIDES, PERMEATED BY A SENSE OF OUTRAGE AT THE WHOLE AFFAIR WHICH EMANATED FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES AND UNDERLINED BY THE ALOOFNESS OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, THE SOVIET LEADER, ALEXANDR SHELEPIN MUST NOW BE SETTLED ONCE AGAIN IN THE FAR MORE HOSPITABLE CONFINES OF HIS MOSCOW OFFICE, PERHAPS SOMEWHAT THE WORSE FOR WEAR. FORTUNATELY FOR HIS EMBARRASSED HOSTS, THE TUC AND PARTICULARLY ITS VERY DISCOMFITED GENERAL SECRETARY, LEN MURRAY, THE SHELEPIN STORY HAS ALL BUT DISAPPEARED FROM THE FRONT PAGES OF THE BRITISH PRESS -- AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT. WHO GAINED AND WHO LOST FROM THE AFFAIR? A FEW WORDS OF TENTATIVE ASSESSMENT ARE IN ORDER. END SUMMARY.

2. THE TUC -- THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE TUC AND IN PARTICULAR, ITS GENERAL SECRETARY LEN MURRAY, GAINED FEW PLAUDITS FOR THEIR ROLE IN THE "SHELEPIN AFFAIR". THE SECRECY OF THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE VISIT, ITS STEALTH THE SINISTER HISTORY OF THE LEADING VISITOR, THE REBUFF TO SECTIONS OF THE PRESS (SOME JOURNALISTS WERE DELIBERATELY EXCLUDED FROM ACCESS TO THE VISITORS), THE MALAPROPISMS INHERENT IN SEVERAL STATEMENTS OF TUC LEADERS REPORTED BY THE LONDON DAILIES ALL CONTRIBUTED TO THE IMAGE OF A TUC WHICH IF NOT WICKED WAS FOOLISH. MILLIONS OF NEWSPAPER READERS (AS FOR EXAMPLE THE DAILY MAIL'S 1.75 MILLION, THE SUN'S 3.37 MILLION, THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'S 1.4 MILLION - TO BE PRECISE AND TO NAME ONLY A FEW) WHO NEVER HEARD OF SHELEPIN BEFORE COULD READ DAILY THAT THE TUC WAS HAVING WHAT THESE WORTHY JOURNALS CONCEIVED AS ILLICIT RELATIONS WITH A FORMER HEAD OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST SINISTER AND MURDEROUS SECRET POLICE FORCES. EVEN THOSE PAPERS WHICH WERE MORE CIRCUMSPECT ABOUT THE VISIT COULD HARDLY MASK THEIR CONTEMPT FOR THE WAY IN WHICH THE VISIT WAS HANDLED BY THE TUC. THE EMBARRASSMENT OF TUC LEADERSHIP WAS PLAIN FOR ALL TO SEE. AS TOM JACKSON, THE TUC POSTAL WORKERS LEADER UNDERSTATED THE CASE TO US: "WE WERE UNCOMFORTABLE". END SUM.

3. PERHAPS THE MOST UNCOMFORTABLE WAS TUC GENERAL SECRETARY

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RETARY LEN MURRAY. ALTHOUGH THE STALWART IMAGE HE CONVEYED DURING THE 1973-4 INDUSTRIAL CRISIS AND THE TUC BRIGHTON CONGRESS LAST SEPTEMBER HAS BEEN LESS IN EVIDENCE RECENTLY, MURRAY HAS BEEN WIDELY RESPECTED BY THE PRESS, BY HIS PEERS, AND MANY OTHERS. BUT HIS HANDLING OF THE SHELEPIN AFFAIR HAS, AS ONE NEWSPAPER DESCRIBED IT, SERIOUSLY "TARNISHED" HIS IMAGE. IT DOES NOT MATTER THAT THE SHELEPIN AFFAIR WAS ESSENTIALLY A LEGACY FROM

HIS PREDECESSOR VICTOR (NOW LORD) FEATHER, NOR THAT JACK JONES, ONE OF THE MAJOR PROPONENTS OF EAST-WEST LABOR DETENTE, REMAINED -- BY AND LARGE -- PRUDENTLY IN THE BACKGROUND DURING MOST OF THE SHELEPIN AFFAIR. AS THE TUC'S FRONT MAN, MURRAY WILL HAVE TO TAKE THE RAP AND REDOUBLE HIS EFFORTS TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE TO HIS IMAGE LEST IT AFFECT HIS LARGER RELATIONS WITH THE PRESS AND WITH HIS COLLEAGUES.

4. THE EFFECT ON SHELEPIN - IT IS OBVIOUSLY NOT POSSIBLE FOR US TO GAUGE THE EFFECT OF THE VISIT ON SHELEPIN'S FUTURE RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET HEIRARCHY ALTHOUGH WE NOTED WITH CONSIDERABLE INTEREST MOSCOW'S

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MESSAGE (REF A) ON THE SUBJECT. (IT'S INTERESTING IN THIS CONNECTION THAT THE DAILY EXPRESS, APRIL 7, STATES THAT "BACK IN MOSCOW LUNKOV (SOVIET AMBASSADOR TO THE UK) IS BEING HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR NOT PREDICTING THE FULL SCALE OF WHAT TURNED OUT TO BE THE MOST EMBARRASSING ANGLO-SOVIET ENCOUNTER FOR YEARS".) ONE CAN DISCERN CLEARLY, HOWEVER, THAT AS FAR AS THE GENERAL BRITISH PUBLIC IS CONCERNED, HE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE BEST-REMEMBERED.
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BERED NOW FOR HIS KGB ROLE. IT MAY WELL BE THAT FOR THE GREAT MASS OF PEOPLE WHO KNEW LITTLE ABOUT THE SOVIET TRADE UNIONS, SHELEPIN MAY HAVE BECOME A HOUSEHOLD WORD BUT HARDLY THE WAY HE PLANNED IT. FAIR OR NOT, THE PRESS MAY HAVE SUCCESSFULLY STIGMATIZED THE SOVIET TRADE UNIONS WITH THE BRAND OF SHMERSH - AFTER ALL THIS IS IAN FLEMING COUNTRY, AND SOME OF THE SCENES DEPICTED IN THE PRESS AND ON TV OF THE DOINGS OF THE ENTOURAGE MIGHT HAVE BEEN LIFTED BODILY OUT OF "FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE".

5. WHO GAINED WHAT? - IF THE BRITISH TUC LOST, WHAT THEN DID THE SOVIET DELEGATION GAIN FOR ALL THE SLINGS AND ARROWS OF OUTRAGED JOURNALISTS, EDITORIAL WRITERS, DEMONSTRATORS, PARLIAMENTARIANS, AND ORDINARY CITIZENS. FIRST OF ALL, THE SOVIET VISITORS CAME AWAY FROM BRITAIN WITH THEIR FAVORITE SOUVENIR -- THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE. (SEE REF B FOR A SUMMARY -- FULL TEXT WILL BE POUCHED.) THIS COMMUNIQUE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE DUSTED OFF FREQUENTLY FOR DISPLAY AND POLITICAL EFFECT WHEN NECESSARY, AND WITHOUT THE CACAPHONIC MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT OF DEMONSTRATORS SHOUTING OR OTHER DISCORDANT MUSIC (JACKSON EXPLAINED THAT THE SHRILL CRIES OF THE PICKETS IN FRONT OF THE TUC HEADQUARTERS COULD BE CLEARLY HEARD IN THE TUC COUNCIL ROOM WHERE THE TWO TRADE UNION LEADERSHIPS WERE ASSEMBLED). SECONDLY, THE COMMUNIQUE SAYS A NUMBER OF THINGS WHICH THE SOVIET DELEGATION MUST HAVE WARMLY WELCOMED. APART FROM THE RITUAL REFERENCE TO DETENTE AND TO WORLD DISARMAMENT, AND SOME AMBIGUOUS REFERENCES TO SEVERAL OF THE WORLD CRISIS AREAS, THE STATEMENT PUTS ITS BLESSING ON THE EXPANSION OF BILATERAL CONTACTS TO INCLUDE JOURNALISTS, TEACHERS AND OTHERS. BUT, AND THIS IS PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT FROM THE SOVIET POINT OF VIEW, THE COMMUNIQUE ADDS -- APPARENTLY FOR THE FIRST

TIME EVER: "IT WAS ALSO SUGGESTED THAT THE TWO ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD CONSIDER COOPERATION IN THE SPIRIT OF THE WARTIME ANGLO-SOVIET TRADE UNION COMMITTEE, AND THIS MATTER WILL BE CONSIDERED BY THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE TWO ORGANIZATIONS".

6. THE HEART OF THE MATTER - IT IS THIS REFERENCE TO THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ANGLO-SOVIET TRADE UNION
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COMMITTEE WHICH PERHAPS IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POINT IN THE COMMUNIQUE. IF SUCH A TRADE UNION COMMITTEE WERE TO BE RE-ESTABLISHED IT WOULD, AMONG OTHER THINGS, MARK "PAID" TO EFFORTS AT RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN THE TUC AND THE AFL-CIO, AT LEAST FOR SOMETIME TO COME. AND CONVERSELY, IT WOULD GIVE CONCRETE FORM TO WHAT ARE NOW RELATIVELY LOOSE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE TUC AND THE SOVIET AUCCTU. IF SUCH A COMMITTEE WERE TO BE ESTABLISHED, IT WOULD ALSO HASTEN THE END OF THE ICFTU. ALLAN HARGREAVES, TUC INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT HEAD, WHO IN GENERAL TERMS CHARACTERIZED THE VISIT AS "A VERY QUIET AFFAIR AND GROSSLY OVER-WRITTEN", INSISTS THAT THE REFERENCE TO THE ANGLO-SOVIET COMMITTEE SHOULD BE VIEWED SIMPLY AS IT READS, NAMELY - IN TERMS OF ITS "SPIRIT" RATHER THAN AS AN INDICATION ON THE PART OF THE TUC THAT IT SERIOUSLY FAVORS THE IDEA OF ITS RESURRECTION. HE FURTHER INSISTS THAT THE VISIT AS A WHOLE SIMPLY "FITS INTO THE PATTERN OF INCREASING CONTACTS" WHICH THE TWO SIDES WISH TO BROADEN AND "TO BRING DOWN TO LOWER LEVELS." TOM JACKSON, A MEMBER OF THE TUC GENERAL COUNCIL AND OF ITS INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE, TENDS TO SHARE THE HARGREAVES INTERPRETATION. HE SAID THAT MURRAY WAS SIMPLY BEING POLITE TO THE SOVIET VISITORS BY ACCEPTING THE LANGUAGE. HOWEVER, JACKSON DID NOT RULE OUT SERIOUS CONSIDERATION OF AN ANGLO-SOVIET COMMITTEE BY THE TUC GENERAL COUNCIL, ALTHOUGH ADDING THAT IF MURRAY INTRODUCES THE PROPOSAL "HE WOULD GET SLAUGHTERED".

7. JACKSON, WHO WAS PRESENT AT MOST OF THE LONDON FUNCTIONS INVOLVING THE SOVIET DELEGATION, BELIEVES THAT SHELEPIN WAS MORE CONCERNED ABOUT OBTAINING AGREEMENT IN TWO OTHER KEY AREAS. HE WANTED TO OBTAIN TUC SUPPORT FOR A JOINT MEETING BETWEEN THE ICFTU AND THE WFTU, BUT ACCORDING TO JACKSON, MURRAY TOOK A VERY STRONG LINE IN OPPOSITION TO THE IDEA. FURTHERMORE, SAID JACKSON,

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SHELEPIN WAS ANXIOUS TO SECURE TUC AGREEMENT THAT FUTURE EUROPEAN "EAST-WEST" TRADE UNION CONFERENCES SHOULD BE REMOVED FROM THE ILO GENEVA FRAMEWORK, BUT MURRAY REPLIED THAT THIS WOULD BE STRONGLY RESISTED BY OTHER EUROPEAN TRADE UNIONS AND THEREFORE "WAS NOT ON".

8. COMMENT: FROM ONE POINT OF VIEW THE SHELEPIN AFFAIR WAS A FAILURE - FROM THE VANTAGE POINT OF BOTH HOST AND
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GUEST. IT STAMPED THE TUC AS EITHER KNAVES OR FOOLS, AT LEAST IN THE EYES OF SOME OBSERVERS. CERTAINLY THE TUC GAINED NOTHING FROM THE VENTURE, EITHER IN CONCRETE OR INTANGIBLE TERMS. AS FOR THE SOVIET AUCCTU THE IMMEDIATE EFFECT WAS DISMAL. ITS LEADER WAS VILIFIED AND ATTACKED ROUNDLY BY THE PRESS, IN PARLIAMENT AND IN THE STREETS, AND THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT REFUSED TO SULLY ITSELF, REFRAINING FROM ANY CONTACT AT ALL. (HARDLY AN AUSPICIOUS IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WILSON VISIT TO MOSCOW.) ON THE OTHER HAND, SHELEPIN DID GET TO BRITAIN EVEN IF HE LEFT IT RATHER BATTERED AND UNBOWED; IT SHOULD BE EASIER FOR HIS SUCCESSORS WITHOUT SECRET POLICE EXPERIENCE TO FOLLOW THE PATH HE BLAZED. BUT WHAT IS MOST WORRISOME IS THAT DESPITE THE SETBACK AND BIT-BY-BIT THE SOVIET AUCCTU COULD WIN THE BEST CONSOLATION PRIZE OF ALL -- THE PERMANENT ESTRANGEMENT OF THE AMERICAN AND BRITISH TRADE UNIONS AND THE COMPLETE DESTRUCTION OF THE OLD FREE TRADE UNION ALLIANCE. (WE SHALL, OF COURSE, EXPLORE FURTHER THE QUESTION RAISED IN REF C IN OTHER CONVERSATIONS WITH TUC LEADERS.)

RICHARDSON

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